

NEWLY DISCOVERED "HABILITADO POR LA NACION" OVERPRINT ON 5 CUARTOS ISSUE (SCOTT #10)

By Don Peterson

It was recently my good fortune to visit IPPS member Richard Arnold in Salt Lake City and to purchase a number of Spanish Philippine stamps. One such stamp was the 5 cuartos vermilion issue of 1859 (Scott #10), overprinted with "HABILITADO POR LA NACION" (Figure 1). Until now, no "HABILITADO POR LA NACION" overprint has been confirmed on Scott #10.

All parts of the overprint are visible, although some parts are better struck than others. The stamp was cancelled with a black fiscal cancel showing a crown and part of the word "GOBIE . . ." which likely stands for "GOBIERNO", common on fiscal cancels at that time. The stamp, overprint, and cancel appear genuine in all respects. The overprint compares well with similar "HABILITADO POR LA NACION" overprints on other Spanish Philippine issues (Scott #25-38).

The handstamp, "HABILITADO POR LA NACION", was used to validate existing supplies of Philippine stamps between 1868 and 1874 to recognize the new Republican form of government in Spain (Harradine, 1987). A total of 27 dies of the Viscaya type were sent from Spain to Manila for the surcharging of all stamps held there.

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Each of the dies was supposedly identical (no varieties) (Palmer, 1912). Existing stamp stocks at that time were overprinted and released between 1868 and 1874. A total of 15 Spanish Philippine postal issues are known to have been surcharged (Scott #25-38), including Scott #11 (overprinted as Scott #28), also an 1859 issue.

Apparently, not all of the previous issues were surcharged, including Scott #1, 2, 6, 7, 12, 15, and 10 (until now). It is presumed they were not overprinted either due to their lack of availability, or because other stamps of that particular value were sufficiently abundant for overprinting. In the case of Scott #10, a lack of available stamps seems unlikely given the availability of mint copies remaining today. This should also be the case for Scott #12 and 15, although no "HABILITADO POR LA NACION" overprints are known on those two issues.

The 5 cuartos vermilion issue (Scott #10) was issued, along with the 10 cuartos rose issue (Scott #11) in 1859 (Palmer, 1912). Both values were issued primarily to satisfy postal rates for interior mail (Peterson, 1988). One 5 cuartos stamp satisfied the single-weight rate for a letter mailed within the Philippines.

Between 1869 and 1874 there were numerous shortages of stamps in the Philippines, due to the political turmoil, resulting in a lack of stamp shipments to the Philippines (Harradine, 1987). We also know there was a need for a 5 cuartos value to satisfy the single-weight interior rate, since Scott #13 and 14 (also 5 cuartos values) were overprinted (becoming Scott #29 and 30, respectively). As shortages continued, even earlier issues were overprinted. By 1873 and 1874, Manila postal officials were overprinting remaining stocks from 1854, 1856, 1859 (Scott #11) and 1862.

It seems logical that some remaining stocks of the 1859 5 cuartos vermilion issue could have been overprinted. The discovery of this overprinted stamp indicates that an unknown, but small number of the 1859 5 cuartos vermilion stamp (Figure 1) were overprinted, probably in 1873 or 1874. A factor contributing to its scarcity was the fact that the overprinted stamp was used primarily on internal mail. Such mail and its affixed stamps had a low probability of survival due to the perils of 120 years of Philippine insects and humidity.

The only mention in philatelic literature of the "HABILITADO POR LA NACION" overprint on the 1859 5 cuartos issue is by Palmer (1912). On page 27, he reports the following:

While no copies of the 5 Cs. of 1859 with this surcharge are known, a German philatelist of Manila informed the writer (Palmer) that he had seen and sold a few such copies. As the writer (Palmer) has never seen a copy of this stamp with surcharge and has only the above statement as authority for having been made, it is not listed herein.

Harradine (1987) also refers to Palmer's statement in his book (page 25).

I am currently not aware of any other copies of this issue and I have found no other references that discuss or list this stamp. Is the stamp, shown in Figure 1, one of those sold by that German philatelist at the turn of the century?

If anyone is aware of other copies of this overprinted issue or of any additional information, please contact Don Peterson, 7408 Alaska Ave., N.W. Washington, D.C. 20012.



Figure 1.

REFERENCES

Harradine, Peter, W.A. Philippine Postage Stamp Handbook, 1854-1892 Jefferson, North Carolina, and London. 1987.

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